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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000121

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [ELTN](#) [EWWT](#) [GA](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SENEGAL CONTINUES

REF: A. 05 BANJUL 860 ET AL

[1](#)B. BANJUL 24

BANJUL 00000121 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph Stafford, reason 1.4 (b and d)

AGREEMENT ON RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Judging from reported official Senegalese/Gambian contacts of late, the two countries' rapprochement process following their August/October 2005 crisis over transport and border issues continues to advance (ref a provides background on the crisis). Building on Gambian President Jammeh's October 2005 discussions in Dakar with the Senegalese and Nigerian Presidents and the December 28-29, 2005 meeting of the Senegalese/Gambian Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) in Banjul (ref b), the two sides' Foreign Ministers, according to the local media, met in Dakar February 25-26 and reached agreement on a plan for re-establishing the "Senegalo-Gambian Permanent Secretariat" in existence prior to the countries' confederation experiment in the 1980's. The two Ministers reportedly agreed to maintain the target date of July 1, 2006, established at the December gathering, for the resurrected Permanent Secretariat to be operational.

PROGRESS ON TRANSPORT ISSUES

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The two sides have also made progress recently on transport issues, according to Gambian media reporting of a late January meeting in Banjul of the bilateral working group responsible for implementation of the parties' November 2004 Road Transport Agreement. Reportedly, the delegations, co-chaired by the Gambian Permanent Secretary for Works and the Senegalese Director of Land Transport, reached agreement on a heretofore tough, nitty-gritty issue -- allocation of permits to Senegalese- and Gambian-registered vehicles for transport of passengers across Senegalese/Gambian border areas. The press reported that the meeting also produced a decision to reduce the "excessive" number of police checkpoints along traffic arteries linking the two countries so as to facilitate movement of goods and passengers between them. There was reportedly discussion of the sensitive matter of tariff increases for the Gambia River ferries heavily used by Senegalese transporters moving between Northern Senegal and Casamance. The two sides announced that the GOTG was preparing a tariff increase package for GOS perusal, but gave no further details. (NOTE: It was the GOTG's abrupt decision in August 2005 to impose hefty tariff increases without prior consultation with the GOS, as required by the relevant bilateral agreement, that sparked

the two-month bilateral crisis, including closure of Senegal's border with The Gambia. END NOTE.)

UPBEAT ASSESSMENT BY SENEGALESE AMBASSADOR

13. (C) In recent conversation with Ambassador, Senegalese Ambassador Ndiounga Ndiaye indicated satisfaction with the state of the Senegalese/Gambian relationship, citing substantial progress in the rapprochement since the 2005 crisis. He asserted that the GOTG, after years of foot-dragging, was now proving cooperative on a long-standing Senegalese priority -- construction of a bridge across The Gambia River to facilitate overland travel between the two portions of Senegal separated by Gambian territory. Noting the decision at the December JCC meeting to place the bridge project under the auspices of the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (OMVG), he expressed confidence that the upcoming OMVG meeting in Dakar would witness agreement on an action plan for the project, including solicitation of donor support. Asked about a previously thorny bilateral issue -- Casamance -- Ndiaye said the GOS "has no problems with the Gambians" on this score. The Senegalese Ambassador remarked that Jammeh seemed to be respecting pledges made at the Dakar summit in October 2005 to refrain from any meddling on behalf of Casamance rebel elements and to ensure that Gambian authorities cooperated with Senegalese counterparts on such issues as denying refuge to rebels in Gambian territory.

COMMENT

14. (C) The December 2005 JCC meeting produced various specific timetables for achievement of bilateral objectives -- e.g., the July 1, 2006 target date for re-activation of the Joint Permanent Secretariat. While the timetables established at the 2004 JCC gathering in Dakar proved to be

BANJUL 00000121 002.2 OF 002

dead letters, this latest JCC gathering appears to have generated genuine impetus for cooperation on key bilateral concerns, the Gambia River bridge project, in particular. A key factor for this impetus is doubtless the GOTG's eagerness, following the August/October 2005 crisis, to avoid provoking renewed confrontation with their far more powerful neighbor. END COMMENT.  
STAFFORD